

Some say it was the Federal response that was too slow. Actually, there were mistakes made at all levels, but most people at all levels responded more quickly and with more money than any other country in the world would have been able to do when faced with a similar natural disaster.

We should be proud of how the American people have responded. I doubt there is a fire or police or sheriff's department of any size in this country that has not sent people to the affected area. Private contributions and volunteer help worth billions has been provided. Congress has voted to send \$62 billion there. Fortunately, the death toll, while still terrible, was not even close to the predicted 10,000, probably with apparently a few hundred.

What should we do now? The best way we can help is for the other body, the Senate, to follow the leadership of this House and pass the Water Resources Development Act. This bill was passed several weeks before our August recess by a vote of 406 to 14 here in the House. We passed it in the House by a similar margin in 2003, but it bogged down in the Senate.

This bill provides roughly \$2 billion for hurricane and flood protection and environmental restoration for the Louisiana coastal region and the gulf coast. No bill before the Congress will do more to protect those areas in the future than this worthy bill. The Senate should not let this bill be bogged down again. It should follow the lead of the House and pass this very important bill just as soon as possible.

No bill does more to provide protection against these tragedies, not only in Louisiana and Mississippi but in other at-risk areas, than does the Water Resources Development Act.

I hope everyone will work together to pass this very important legislation just as soon as possible.

ARAB THOUGHT FORUM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Washington (Mr. McDERMOTT) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. McDERMOTT. Mr. Speaker, I recently journeyed to Amman, Jordan, where I met with Iraqi exiles and Jordanian leaders. While there, I had the privilege of addressing a special meeting of the widely respected Arab Thought Forum, a community of leaders from throughout the Middle East.

For a quarter of a century, the ATF has examined issues affecting the Arab world and developed realistic solutions. There are over 200 members from throughout the Arab world. His Royal Highness Prince El Hassan Bin Talal of Jordan is the president.

My goal was to listen, to learn, and to bring back whatever message this distinguished organization wanted America to hear directly. Their perspective is uniquely valuable. They are not anti-U.S. or anti-West. They sup-

port us even as they champion a strong and safe Arab world. The ATF wants Iraq to succeed. They live every day what we see for a few minutes every night on the news. They do not hate us, but they know who does. They know that hatred is a cancer that spreads if not treated, and they know that Western words that defy Iraqi reality is not treatment.

Every night we witness the unbearable heartbreak of another child dead, another family wailing in agony, unaware of the news camera that acts as a voyeur in their anguish.

How often have we neutralized our feelings to the sight of an Iraqi convulsed in the street, rocking back and forth, holding on to the lifeless body of a loved one? Even the most callous cannot help but admit that Iraq has become a minefield of hatred and violence that pierces Western rhetoric to the very heart. Iraq is close to civil war, and the presence of U.S. forces is a focal point for this blind rage.

Saying it is time to get out would be very easy for me. Saying it is time to find a way out is not, but I am saying just that. The United States needs a plan that protects our soldiers and offers some chance to stabilize Iraq. We are nowhere close to that today.

Over 1,900 U.S. soldiers have died, between 25,000 and 100,000 Iraqis have been killed, and tens of thousands of Americans and Iraqis have been wounded, and the violence goes on.

The development of an Iraqi Constitution was supposed to be a peace process by another name to bring Kurds, Shiites and Sunnis together, but the Sunnis leaders strongly rejected the process and the document it produced.

Middle Eastern leaders told me that the constitution is sort of a "damned if you do, damned if you don't" sort of affair. They say, as written now, passage would mean another 15 years of war and civil war at the least. If it fails, the insurgents will claim victory over the United States and plunge Iraq even deeper into violence.

As many Arab leaders see it, we are rushing headlong into a lose-lose situation. To these people, the conclusion is inescapable. Many I met privately believe that the United States' actions can only mean the U.S. entered Iraq for oil. They fear the United States will remain not because it is in Iraq's best interests, but because it is in America's oil interests.

Why else, they ask, would the administration refuse to pledge that we will not build permanent military bases? Why else, they wonder, would the administration stubbornly refuse to alter their course in the face of reality? These are our friends talking.

In that spirit, they offered an idea, a breakthrough that changes everything. They do not condemn the administration or America. They do not call for the immediate withdrawal of U.S. forces. Instead, they asked me to bring back a message of hope that peace can

be achieved not by force, rhetoric, or the United States alone.

□ 1745

The Arab Thought Forum believes the road to peace can only be found by having a respected Arab leader convene an Iraqi summit conference without the West dictating the terms. Without the West dictating the terms. It may even be possible for his Royal Highness al Hassan to lead such a summit, but only if the United States stops talking and starts listening. No one I met believes the present course will lead to peace in Iraq.

This weekend, thousands of Americans will participate here in Washington and across the Nation in Operation Cease-Fire. The event will convulse the Nation, pitting Americans who want us out of Iraq immediately against those who believe it is worth going on. We remain deeply divided.

Mr. Speaker, urge the President to stop the rhetoric and get the Arab Thought Forum on point to have such a summit. Only by sitting down with all the parties, led by an Arab, can this be stopped.

FOREIGN EXCHANGE STUDENTS ARE GOODWILL AMBASSADORS FOR U.S.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SODREL). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Utah (Mr. BISHOP) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BISHOP of Utah. Mr. Speaker, last Sunday during the Emmy awards, I realized that one of the most popular new comedies about domestic life in America is *Desperate Housewives*, and one of the most popular ongoing dramas about domestic life in America is *The Sopranos*. And even though a majority of Americans still have regular contact with church, one of the few shows that actually shows contact between a family and religion is *The Simpsons*. Now, it is not my intention to try to bash television shows or Hollywood, but these are hardly adequate or accurate views of America, and this inaccuracy does have policy implications.

If the image of America is derived from the popular culture and not the reality of what America is, it has an impact on our foreign affairs. Let me try to illustrate. In the year 2003, I was part of the Congressional Study Group on Germany and had the opportunity, with others, of representing the United States in Berlin with the German Government, which at the time was, shall we say, not a big U.S. supporter of U.S. foreign policy.

In fact, that particular German Government had just a very narrow election by doing a significant amount of America bashing to get there. But the tone of that government would have been more acrimonious were it not for a senior SPD member, Hans Ulrich Kluse, from Hamburg, who, at considerable political risk, put his reputation